

Less attractive to stay in U.S. for foreign students

Originally from a remote village outside of Mumbai, India, Ketan Risbud decided to enroll in a master's degree program at the University of Bridgeport in 2007 for greater opportunities in the technology field.

At the time, the United States was leading the booming tech industry and it was very attractive for immigrants to want to go to school and work in the country. But since the recession hit and other countries have been able to catch up to the U.S. standards across a number of industries, it has become significantly less attractive for immigrants to want to stay and work in the U.S.

The number of foreign students enrolled at the University of Connecticut has decreased 13 percent since 2006, according to data from the Office of Higher Education.

As a result, the local economy is suffering, said Tarek Sobh, University of Bridgeport School of Engineering dean, who often speaks on the subject of international students.

"In a nutshell, we're not producing enough domestic graduates," Sobh said. "The numbers are simply dismal for students in emerging STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) careers."

Connecticut has benefited greatly from the foreign student population, Sobh said. There aren't enough skilled workers to fill job vacancies, particularly in STEM careers, and graduating foreign students have been able to partially fill in that gap.

Risbud did find an IT job with Avon Products Inc. in Rye, N.Y., when he graduated in 2009, but as the last two years count down on his work visa, Risbud said he's been looking for jobs elsewhere, saying he doesn't expect he'll be able to secure a green card with the company. In order to stay in the country, Risbud said he'll need to find another employer who is willing to go through the often laborious and cumbersome process of applying for a green card.

This is the way the immigration process has worked for many years, but fewer immigrants are finding it worth the hassle, Sobh said.

"They are always living here temporarily – 20 years, if not more," Sobh said. "In the past that was OK, but now the economy isn't great. For them to stay 20 years – working very hard on a temporary status – there are so many places in the world, including where they came from, that are doing amazingly well."

In his job search, Risbud has had three job offers in the U.S. already. But all three require a significant pay cut. He's been in contact with Indian companies as well, but each has said they want him to stay in the U.S. until his visa has fully expired, in order to gain more valuable experience. As he weighs his options, he also has the career aspects of his wife, Mugdha Shevade, to consider. She will also graduate from the University of Bridgeport in May with a technology management degree.

Having a dependent visa, Shevade has only been allowed to go to school here and hasn't been allowed to work. Shevade said the job outlook doesn't look good for her after she graduates, which is frustrating considering how much she's spent on her degree. She said she thinks it might be easier to move to the United Kingdom than stay here.

"It's very unattractive to be honest," she said. "If you don't get a job, it's basically an investment that doesn't give you anything back."

Written by: [Jennifer Bissell](#) on September 20, 2012.

